

OBEDIENCE TO MAGISTRATES.

A

SERMON FOR THE TIMES;

DISCUSSING THE

HIGHER-LAW THEORY.

AS DEVELOPED IN THE RECENT

TRAGIC SCENES OF HARPER'S FERRY.

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SERMON.

ROM. XIII, 1—5.

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Will thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake."

The obvious design of the Apostle, in these verses, is to inculcate upon all christian citizens the duty of implicit obedience to civil magistrates.

Subordination to *rightful* authority is not supposed to be at all questionable among christians. Every true disciple of Christ will at once admit the obligation, and cheerfully render a prompt obedience.

On the other hand, it is supposed to be equally clear, that no man is morally bound to yield obedience to authority, which is not rightful. This is too palpable to need any discussion. But the **RIGHTFULNESS** of authority, in the case of governments, laws, and rulers, may, often become doubtful to those who are scrupulous. And doubt, here, must necessarily weaken a sense of obligation to obey. The Apostle seems to have discovered such misgivings among christian converts at Rome, relative to the claims of the Roman government. Their doubts might have originated and gathered confirmation from various considerations of truth.

1. The existing governments of their time, were, for the most part, founded in violence and oppression. Usurpation and conquest were then, the ordinary steps to power. "The higher powers," even the chiefest magistrates of the times, could be viewed, in the judgment of candor, only as base usurpers, and bloody aspirants, whose hands were stained with crimson guilt, and whose hearts were dark with purposes of deadly hostility to every principle of the christian system.

2. They could see in the existing Roman government which was in authority over them, simply an organized system of Paganism, excessively incorporated with the most odious forms of idolatry, the antipodes of the true worship of Jehovah, and the purity and spirituality of the christian system, with which all true christians had personally identified themselves. Moreover, many of the christians at Rome, were converted Jews, and had been early and thoroughly taught to abhor the heathen, and hate idolatry. Thus all the prejudices of their education and early training, together with all the principles of their new religion would naturally prompt them to question the *rightfulness* of Roman authority. Their humiliating experience also, under an involuntary national subjection to the Roman yoke, would naturally provoke the feeling that they ought not, as christians, to be subject to Roman authority at all.

3. Another consideration, that might have increased Paul's anxiety, and the danger of those to whom he wrote, was the fact that *he* knew, and *they* knew, that there were circumstances, in which it was right and well-pleasing to God, boldly and decidedly to refuse obedience to civil rulers; as when Peter and John refused to be silent.—Acts 4:19. And when the three Hebrew children refused to worship the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up—Dan. 3:18—as also in case of Daniel, when he refused to obey the decree of Darius.—Dan. 6:10.

Now, to intercept and prevent the dangerous tendency of these, and other causes, the Apostle proceeds here, most carefully to instruct those who were thus exposed to fatal mistake; and to enforce the great principles that should govern all

christians in reference to the powers that were then existing and claiming their allegiance.

1. He establishes the *rightfulness* of the authority, which they were inclined to doubt, by showing that it was ordained of God, and that those who administered the affairs of the government were God's ministers. For this reason he most solemnly enjoins subordination upon every person. "*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.*" It matters not *how* they come to be. It matters not *what* they have come to be. The simple fact that they *are in being*, and in operation as an acknowledged system of civil jurisprudence, is the evidence of their legitimate authority, as an ordinance of God. There is no such power but of God. God acknowledges *any* such government, and *every* such government as his ordinance, even upon the condition of its coming into being. "The powers that be," whatever they are, "are ordained of God." On this ground, he urges the duty of subordination even to the idolatrous and tyrannical government of Rome, though it be under the hard and oppressive hand of Nero, or Caligula, or Domitian. It is the *being* of "the powers," that we are to receive as the evidence that they are of God. Therefore, be subject. Let all be subject. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers," because "the powers that be are ordained of God." The Apostle urges this injunction, not as an arbitrary dogma of a dark superstition, nor yet, as a temporising doctrine of expediency; but as a sober christian duty, to be performed for conscience sake.

This argument, of course, must have settled the matter with all honest-minded christians, who desired not to be found fighting against God. It might not have solved all the mysteries, nor removed all the difficulties, that had perplexed their minds. But it must have settled the question of duty, as a matter of conscience. For, however strange any revealed fact may seem to us, if only it come to us on the authority of God, it is proved and settled, beyond any doubt, in the mind of a christian. Now, it is stated to Roman christians, upon the authori-

ty of God, that this corrupt Roman government is God's ordinance, and that these base usurpers and loathsome heathen idolators, who have come into power, only by rapine and blood, are God's ministers. We must be subject, for conscience sake.

Though, we do not understand why good conscientious christian men might not rule better than these idolatrous pagans, and better secure all the ends of justice ; yet God, in his wisdom, has otherwise directed, and in his providence, has chosen them as his ministers, and put them in authority over us. We must be subject to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake.

Every intelligent christian, in the exercise of common honesty and candor, must perceive, that in debating this question in his own mind, he will be in danger of impugning the wisdom of God, and of setting up his own judgment as superior to that of his Creator. For this first argument is ultimate, unanswerable, and perfectly conclusive.

2. Another argument employed by the Apostle, to enforce this duty, is that the ends proposed, both in the *ordinance* and *administration* of governments, are *benevolent*. "For rulers are not a terror to *good* works, but to the *evil*; do that which is good, and thou shall have praise of the same." v. 3. God ordains governments over men, to encourage good order among them, to promote peace, to strengthen virtue, and to restrain vice. Thus "The powers that be," are intended to subserve the public and general welfare. These ends of benevolence are but imperfectly secured by the *best* forms of human government; yet the *worst* forms of law, are better than no law. Any kind of government is better than anarchy. These "powers that be," are indescribably better than nothing. However partially they secure the ends of justice and order, they are the best you have. By no means resist "The power." Do nothing to weaken it, but use it rather. Avail yourselves of all the benefits that may be afforded by it. For the sake of the general welfare, inspire public confidence in it; and as far as may be, universal subordination to it. Furthermore,

he assures them, that God intended governments, not merely for certain general and *public* benefits; but for the *individual* good. "*Good to thee.*" v. 4. *Good* governments may not always operate equally with reference to individuals, but under the wisest and best, human administration, may operate to the disparagement of many individual interests. But the general bearing, and main effects of any government is to promote the good of individuals. However corrupt we may reasonably suppose any government to be, it is yet infinitely better for each individual than to have none at all. Therefore Paul would exhort each person to seek the peace of whatever government God in his providence may have ordained over him, because in the the peace thereof he may find peace.

Civil magistrates, "the powers that be," the incumbents in office, are the servants that God employs to execute his plans to secure the order of society, the peace, comfort and happiness of mankind. Now, therefore, if you resist this ordinance of God, and resist these ministers of God, you do yourselves an injury, you injure your fellow men—you injure your country. You violate both the first and second tables of the law. And the guilt of this sin against both God and man is aggravated by the addition of great folly.

3. The third argument, employed by the Apostle, is a consideration of *prudence*.

The magistrate is not only invested with authority, but with power to enforce that authority. Verse 4th. "*If thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain.*" The sword which he beareth, as the minister of God, is an emblem of the *rightfulness* of the authority which he hath received from God, and of the power which God hath given him to enforce it. The sword is made for the destruction of life; and in the hand of the magistrate, is intended to represent him as having power over the *life* of men. God had early declared, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Gen. 9:6.

The sword in the hand of the magistrate, indicates not only that God has given him the authority and the power to take

life ; but also the instrument with which he, as God's servant, may execute the very sentence which had been written against the man, who should shed the blood of his fellow man.

The sword is not borne by the magistrate as a mere badge of his office, but for execution in very deed. "*He beareth not the sword in vain,*" for he is the minister of God to *execute* wrath, not the wrath of his fellow men, but the wrath of God, whose servant he is ; and whose sentence, of condemnation to death, resteth upon those who shed man's blood.

Now for the wrath's sake, the Apostle most solemnly warns them to be subject. He earnestly assures them, "they that do resist shall receive to themselves *damnation*," i. e. punishment. They shall be certainly, condemned and executed. As certainly as the magistrate beareth not the sword in vain ; as certainly as he is commissioned of God to "go forth as a *revenger*, to *execute wrath*," they must fall under the penalty of the laws they violate.

Now, therefore, for the Lord's sake,—for the sake of yourselves,—for the sake of your fellow men,—for the sake of your country, resist not "*the powers that be.*" Yea, for conscience sake, and for wrath's sake, Paul would warn all men not to resist "*the powers that be.*" Whatever of authority may exist, rather cherish, and strengthen than weaken and destroy.

In the judgment of Paul then, the sin of resisting civil magistrates, on the part of christians, is fraught with peculiar turpitude. It is sin of no ordinary character ; for it is against both God and man, and involves also *extreme folly* and *mad presumption*. And we cannot doubt the Apostle's authority, for he spake according to the mind of the Spirit.

If, therefore, such principles were applicable to the Roman government in the days of Paul, we can see no good reason why they may not apply in the case of any government now in existence.

The Apostle's views are corroborated also, by other scriptures. This is the ground uniformly maintained both by the Old and the New Testaments. We have, indeed, no specific

rules in the Bible for hypothetical extremities. But we have no recorded examples, where the rule of uniform non-resistance to law, has been disregarded with approbation. The three Hebrew children offered no resistance to magistrates by refusing to obey. They could not submit to the ordinance, but they could, and did, to the penalty. The same was true of Daniel, of Peter and John, and of *Christ himself*. He would not suffer his too ardent disciple, to make resistance in his behalf. He even rebuked his unauthorized attempt, saying "Put up thy sword again into his place, for he that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." He also put forth his own hand and healed the injury that had been done. He set before all his disciples the example of submission, to the most aggravated injustice, when he might have commanded twelve legions of angels to a successful resistance, and a perfect rescue. He even prayed for his murderers, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Instructed thus, by his example, and animated by his spirit, all the faithful martyrs of Jesus have meekly submitted unto death, without offering resistance to the persecuting powers that were in authority over them. We know of no passage of scripture, in the Bible, either directly, or indirectly, authorizing resistance to "the powers that be."

On the other hand, we read, as in the text, "They that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." "He that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God." "Honor the king." "Thou shalt not speak evil of the rulers of thy people." "Curse not the king even in thy heart." God would therefore have christians labor, rather to strengthen, and not weaken, the hands of our rulers, to quench, and not fan, the rising flames of insurrection and rebellion, to pluck up and destroy, and not plant and cultivate, those heart-~~rending~~ discontents that bring forth fruit in treason. And to use their utmost influence, both by example and precept, to encourage universal subordination to rulers, whether to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as those sent forth by him. And

to "pray always, for all in authority: that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all Godliness and honesty."

The too common practice, in which, even professing christians sometimes indulge of villifying governors, and reproaching the persons of magistrates, not only in common discourses, but in newspapers, books, pamphlets, popular lectures, and, often, in promiscuous harangues from the pulpit, is not less contrary to the Word of God, than dangerous to the commonwealth. It ought, therefore, by all means, to be eschewed.

The precise time when it may be proper for a christian to refuse obedience to magistrates, may be a very difficult point to ascertain. It is surely to be regarded as an extreme and perilous crisis. For it is confronting authority, which is invested with the power of life and death. The scriptures are silent here. And this silence itself, obliges the inference, that *obedience is the rule, and refusal only the exception.*

If we take the ground, that every degree of corruption in the government, or its administration when manifested, is proper reason for refusing to obey; then we may excuse ourselves at once from obedience to any government on earth. For there is no perfection in aught that is human, either of wisdom or benevolence, either in purpose or action, either in character, or conduct. Moral defilement, political corruption, and official infidelity, are necessarily incidental to all human governments. Hence, if this premise be correct, it would amount to a universal absolution of all men from the obligation to obey any existing authority, and therefore reduce the world at once, to a condition of hopeless anarchy.

Or, if we take the ground that we are bound to obey, *only* so far as the government and its administration subserve the ends of Justice and mercy—and that beyond this, there may be resistance because not ordained of God. Then again we are driven to absurdity.

The gubernative investment will then become a mere myth of the imagination, simply an unreal figment, altogether undefinable, incomprehensible, indeterminable, and variable, without any persistent continuity. It will indeed appear as

a coat of many colors, and changeable colors also ; varying with all the different phases and degrees of moral obliquity that may appear in the government, or of apparent personal or official infidelity in the rulers. King Saul, in this case is the Lord's annointed at Jabesh-gilead, but when he gets to Gibeon of Benjamin, he is out of office. Hence, from day to day, and from hour to hour, through all the variable reign of this first king of Israel, he must needs have the prophet Samuel by his side, with his horn of oil, for thorough reinvestment, at the end of each official act, either of weakness or treachery.

The error of this position is further apparent from the fact, that the same act of the government may seem to secure the ends of justice and mercy with reference to *ONE MAN*, and at the same time, seem to conflict with the rights and immunities of *another*. In the first case then, it will be lawful to acknowledge the ordinance of God and the administration of Justice. But in the second, we recognise only, an institution of *Satan* and the administration of sin. Thus, "the powers that be" must be regarded by all, just as the varying, and often conflicting interests of men may seem to be affected by their operation.

Again, the absurd and impractical nature of this premise may be shown from the fact, that different men have different views and convictions about what constitutes justice and mercy and right, in the administration of law.

One man is a slave-holder, and believes the relation of master and servant, to be a God-appointed and God-approved relation, and that this time-honored institution is sanctioned by the Bible. Hence, he denies the validity of any government, that will not sanction it, legislate for it, and defend it. *Another*, believes that slavery is of the devil, and that any government that tolerates it is not of God, and therefore, void of authority, and not to be obeyed. One man is a *duelist*, and believes it right for him to defend his honor. He thinks too that the Bible sanctions this mode, and quotes the example of David and Goliath as approved of God. Where-

fore, he considers no government worthy of his allegiance that condemns and punishes this practice. But another believes it to be a direct violation of the 6th commandment. Among those who profess to be conscientious, one has squared his conscience to the Douay-Bible. Another adopts the Koran. A third, the Shaster. A fourth, the law of expediency. A fifth is a Jew and repudiates the New Testament. He verily thinks he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus, and that no government can be of God, which interdicts his haling men and women to prison and to death, which he deems his conscientious duty. As every man thinketh, therefore, so is he, in regard to the "powers that be." Thus we are driven again to the extreme law of anarchy, that every man may "*do what is right in his own eyes.*"

Again; the falseness of this position is evinced by its injurious effects.

That tragedy of blood, at Harper's Ferry, was only the natural and legitimate result of this false premise. It is not to be ascribed at all, to John Brown, the once peaceful resident of Ohio. He was an orderly citizen, a man of amiable temper, respectable character, unimpeachable veracity, and altogether dutiful and reliable, both as a member of the State, and of the church. It is rather to be attributed to John Brown, as deranged and frenzied by the working of this iniquitous principle. In the judgment of charity, he must have been deranged. Those who formerly knew him, can regard him only as a Monomaniac at Harper's Ferry. In this aspect of the matter, he, as well as his afflicted family, was entitled to the tenderest sympathy, of which our nature is capable. Yet, of the *principle* that deranged him, we may speak in terms of unqualified reprehension. And with principles alone, are we, at present, concerned. Under the conduct of this delusion, our unfortunate fellow citizen appears first as a standard bearer in the civil dissensions of Kansas,—then a hero of the war,—a captain in the field of blood, the brave leader of hosts against the armies of aliens. We have nothing, in-

decid, to say against *defensive war*, on the part of christians, in circumstances of unavoidable extremity. But what should induce a sane christian to seek such extremities? Strange transformation of a christian!—the christian head of a christian family! A husband and a father! Once, he led his children to the house of God, and the altars of prayer. Once, he taught them the gospel of peace and good will to men. But now he is leading them to the field of carnage, and teaching them the arts of war, and is planting them as soldiers in the camp!!

The gospel transforms the lion into a lamb, but the opposite working of this ungodly principle transforms the lamb into a lion.

Next, we hear of him, under this leading, ~~he is~~ at the head of his troops, marching through extended plains, and difficult morasses, marshes and mountains; not now, in open manly war for the defence of life, as ostensibly, before; but in a clandestine war of aggression, upon the legalized institutions of the South, secretly running off the slaves, to deliver them from bondage. Here, we may suppose, he is met by an old christian friend. Why, Brother Brown, what are you doing here? “Doing?” he replies, “I am doing as I would be done by.” But do you not know that “The powers that be, are ordained of God?” “No;” says Brown, “God authorizes no man, and no government to do wrong. I make war upon all men—all governments, all constitutions, all enactments, all laws, systems and principles, that do not subserve the ends of justice and mercy. I go by the higher-law, the inner law. My *convictions* I follow to the death.” Now in this frenzy, Brown, totally, overlooked several important considerations, that once, he well understood, viz: 1. That a distinctly revealed ordinance of God is an infinitely higher law than his own convictions.

2. That the rule of doing to others, as we would that they should do to us, has equally as direct an application to *slaveholders*, as to slaves.

3. That in any case, the gospel forbids the christian

making war, even upon things that are wrong, with carnal weapons.

But this *higher-law* idea had blinded his mind, and frenzied his brain, and carried him back, away through the dark ages, down to the days of the Judges in Israel, when every man did *just what was right in his own eyes*.

It was this deadly delusion that freighted the cars for Harper's Ferry with Sharp's rifles and kegs of powder, in a time of peace. It was this ungodly principle that reared those monstrous piles of standard spears, broad swords, bayonets and other implements for a war of aggression, plunder and blood; and even with the shovels and picks, to bury the dead, and cut through mountains.

In the esteem of all who hold this principle, Brown was not to blame in all this matter. He was only acting out his own conscientious views, in exact conformity with his *convictions of truth and duty*, simply obeying the higher law.

Well, then, if the fault was in the principle, let us hang the principle and spare the man. Oh that it were practicable to sever this unhallowed doctrine from its unfortunate victim!

If we could hang, or in any other way extirpate, and utterly destroy this iniquitous principle, we might safely let the man live, and no doubt he would have lived the remainder of his natural life, as orderly and useful a citizen as he ever was. But because he could not be divested of this principle, he must die at Charlestown as one unfit to live.

We may charge upon this strange delusion the death of all those men, who have been executed in Virginia. It is not the state hanging men just for an *idea*,—a *scruple*. It was this higher law principle of *conscience* *VERSUS* the *government*, that reared the scaffold, adjusted the rope, and cleared the blocks, and so hung them until they were dead. What, but this *idea*, induced Brown and his company to leave their homes and go to Virginia? The statutes of the State were there before. The timber for the gallows and the scaffold was there before. For many years, all these provisions had existed without harm to these men. Why then had they

not performed the functions of their office years before? What strange happening occurred in A. D. 1859? Were these inanimate objects roused to wrath and moved out of their place, actively, to hunt, and destroy these unfortunate fellow creatures? No; they were steadfast, abiding in their place, as harmless in themselves, as ever before. Had these infatuated men remained at their homes, quietly attending to their own proper duties, none of these Virginia fixtures could ever have reached or injured them at all.

But this guilty principle, blinded their mind, deceived their heart, and led them forth even as an ox to the slaughter. It was this, that brought them from their homes, and led them to the shores of Virginia, and induced them, virtually, to ascend the scaffold, and use all this standing machinery for their own hanging.

Similar provisions exist in every State in this Union, where capital punishment is tolerated. There is a gallows in every county of the State of Ohio, which any class of men, may use, whenever they become sufficiently infatuated by the same delusion, to venture a war of bloody invasion upon "*the powers that be*." This is a principle that will hang any man, in any State, who will follow its leading.

These frenzied insurrectionists, at Harper's Ferry, had they not been sceptical, might have known that this would be the result. For as long ago, as Paul penned the words of our text, God declared "They that resist shall receive to themselves *damnation*," i. e. the penalty of the laws they violate.

This higher-law idea is not altogether new. It is, in some sense, as old as the world. Sinners under the government of God, have in all past time been decoyed and ruined by their scepticism. God, in his Word, points out to all men a certain rock, on which, if any man fall, he shall be broken; but which, if it fall on any man, will grind him to powder. He faithfully describes the ways of evil, and sends forth watchmen and sentinels to guard their entrance, and warn all men of the impending danger. But the sceptic says, I

do not believe *all* the Bible. I believe only a *part* of it. I go by the higher-law, the *inner* impulse; I think for myself, and do what is right in my own eyes. Thus, while leaning to his own understanding, he falls upon the very dangers, of which God had forewarned him, and he is ground to powder. His principles deceived him, and led him to his fate. So said Brown and his company; and so say all like-minded people, who adopt the higher-law idea, with reference to the "*powers that be*." We do not believe Paul in Rom. 13:1-5 except in part. "*The powers that be are ordained of God*" only in part, just so far as they subserve the ends of justice and mercy in our opinion. The *good*, is of God, but the *evil* is of the devil. We must think for ourselves, judge for ourselves. We must go by the higher-law, and be subject to the "*power*," in part, just as it seems right in our own eyes. So this false light deceived, decoyed, and drove them to wreck.

Iniquitous, guilty absurdity! Oh that it had died with the deluded victims of its deadly venom! But, alas! it still survives to rankle, and work delusion in other hearts; and produce disturbance and mischief in other States.

This *higher-law idea*, is the real *animus* of all the mobs that have agitated the different sections of our country; and so often disturb the peace of the people, distracting the affairs of both the Church, and the State. The Rescue-affair, at Wellington, Ohio, came not to so extreme a result, as that at Harper's Ferry; yet, so near it, that another spark might have fired the magazine, and reared in Cuyahoga county twenty scaffolds for the hanging of higher-law murderers. But thanks to a merciful Providence, no blood was shed. There was, indeed, the disturbance of the public peace, the debasement of public morals, the calling of courts, the angry conflict of parties, the fierce invective of contending civilians; and the consumption of many thousands of the people's money, and the conviction and imprisonment of a few that were implicated. Yet these were the happiest results that could have been reasonably anticipated at the commencement.

This evil principle works just as naturally, and as disastrously, in the Church, as in the State. For it sets up an idea, an inward conviction, as the higher-law, higher than courts, higher than constitutions, or statutes, or councils: yea, higher than the highest ordinances of high heaven itself. The church, like "*the powers that be*," is an ordinance of God, only in part; and therefore, is in authority, only in part, hence it may be resisted in part. All things, then, in the church, which seem to conflict with the *inner impulse*, the higher-law idea, it will be right, in their own eyes, to repudiate and resist to the uttermost. If the inward convictions of other members should chance to differ from their's, no matter. They feel no way bound to follow the higher-law of majorities, but their own higher-law, doing just what is right, in their *own* eyes. Here, of course, is the end of all fraternity with the church, of all charity for their brethren, of all confidence in them, and of all fellowship with them. And with confidence and affection, all christian communion ceases of necessity. The authority of the church they repudiate. The obligations of their church covenant they abjure. All the rules of order and discipline, pertaining to the church, they ignore. Simply because their inward convictions differ from those of the majority, they come out at once, and set up, for themselves. And, for all these disorganizing grievances, there is no redress; because, in purpose, principle, and practice, they acknowledge allegiance to no authority in the universe, except this *inner impulse*,—this scruple,—this higher-law idea. Hence, of course, there can be no discipline in their case. How many churches have been thus rent in twain, all over our land! How often have christian communities been thus divided and set, every man, over against his neighbor! And how often has the cause of Christ been prostrated in the dust, and made to bleed!

The marriage institution, according to this rule, is not more sacred than any other ordinance of God. Those, who adopt this higher-law idea, deem it an ordinance of God, just

as civil government, or the christian church is so, only in part, only so far, as it subserves the ends of benevolence. So far they can freely use, and improve it. But, whenever, according to their *inner impulse*, this ordinance ceases to subserve the proposed ends, it comes in conflict with the higher-law. They have first serious scruples, then strong convictions, then positive decisions, and fixed determinations. According to the *inner idea*, the higher-law, this ordinance has lost its *utility*, and, therefore, its *validity*, and may be repudiated at once. Hence it is, that here, and there, all over our country, we hear of a husband being divorced for insufficient reasons, or of a wife, being driven from the door of her own home, to seek her bread from the kindness of remote relatives, or from the cold charities of the world.

The mandates of this higher-law are always cruel, and as imperative as they are cruel. Though it break up families, root up churches, subvert governments, revolutionize empires, and drive the plowshare of violence, even through heart-strings; it is utterly incorrigible and relentless. It knows no repentance. Yet all this is called progress! And progress, truly it is! But under such a progress, we should soon have the owls of the desert to hoot in our windows, and the cars of Juggernaut to trail through our streets. It is progress, only, toward heathenism, and toward hell.

We have yet another argument for the reiteration of the doctrine, which involves this principle. It is this. *It is totally unscriptural, and positively anti-christian.* It contravenes the very spirit and principle, which are most clearly revealed, and most frequently urged by the gospel. If an *individual* should abuse the accidental power, which he may chance to have over you, and oppressively, compel you to go with him a mile, the injunction is, go with him twain. If he violently, take away thy coat, give him thy cloak also. If he wickedly, smite thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also. On what gospel theory then, may we

infer that we are not under obligation to submit to inequality and injustice or injury, when brought about by legislation, on the part of the government? Does the teaching that enjoins a meek and passive endurance of all manner of insult, and malignant personal abuse, on the part of unauthorized individuals, tolerate resistance to "*the powers that be*," when legislation operates to our damage? If my taxes are unmercifully exorbitant, may I refuse to pay? If my suit in court is decided to the detriment of my estate; may I, therefore, refuse to submit, and deny the validity of both the court and the decision? If the specific provisions of the law, which regulates the execution of *Wills*, and the administration upon the estates of deceased owners, should operate unequally, and oppressively, upon widows and orphans, who ought to be protected; may we, therefore, denounce the government as not of God, and all these specific enactments as null and void? The Apostle Peter settles the gospel principle in 1. Pet. 2d chap., where he enjoins submission "to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as those sent forth by him." And, carrying out the same principle, though with reference to another subject, in the 18th verse he writes, "Not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." Subjection to the *froward*, is here represented as being more praise-worthy than subjection to the good and gentle. What glory is it, to be subject to law, when every thing is to your pleasing? A man, without any special virtue, might obey, when he is pleased with the law, pleased with the executive, and pleased with all the operation and results of the legislation; and especially when he can approve all the principles, in any way involved. His submission under such circumstances, discovers no excellencies of character, which merit special commendation.

On the contrary, it is rather thank-worthy to be subject, when things are not so agreeable. When we heartily disapprove of the principles involved, and feel disgusted with the personal character of the rulers, and feel personally and es-

pecially pained and injured with the results, if then, "we endure with patience, suffering wrongfully;" and for conscience toward God submit to every ordinance, "*this is thank-worthy.*" "*This is acceptable with God.*" This is a christian virtue, and a glory to the christian character, according to the gospel. See Tit. 3; 1-2.

It is not then, too much to infer that God intended the privilege of refusing obedience to civil magistrates to be dispensed very sparingly, and to be used with the greatest caution. We know of no cases, where it has ever been practiced with the approbation of God, except, when the edicts of the government have contravened some clearly ascertained "*Thus saith the Lord.*" Then, for conscience toward God, it becomes imperative. In all such cases, the civil power makes hostile invasion upon another kingdom, which is not of this world at all. It then becomes a persecuting power. Each of the noted ten persecutions of the early christian church, was signally characterized as a war of open aggression upon the spiritual kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The object was the conquest of new territory, which had not been, previously, the legitimate subject of civil legislation at all. Christ claimed exclusive prerogatives in this department. The disciples of Christ had sworn allegiance to him, and had subscribed the articles of confederation to submit only to him, as their acknowledged Prince and Saviour, in all matters of religion. For them to yield this supremacy to the civil and secular department, would be to commit treason against Christ, and to abjure their religion. From the beginning, all wars between the secular and sacred departments of human interest, have been only the unwarrantable and unauthorized invasion of the one, upon the rightful prerogatives of the other. This is the fundamental principle and essential element of all persecution. The State may not have supremacy in matters of direct duty toward God. This is forbidden ground to the State. God has reserved the exclusive supremacy, here, for himself alone. He has surrendered this to no government, and to no being in

the universe. Parents, whose authority over their children may be supposed as unlimited, as human authority can be, may not infringe upon this reserved supremacy of God in this spiritual domain. Children may be subject to their parents—only “in the Lord.” He who is Lord, over both the Church and the State, has fixed the limits of rightful jurisdiction both to the one and the other. Hence we are taught by the example of Apostles and Martyrs, in all past time, that we ought rather to die, than to compromise the principle of direct and exclusive allegiance to God, in all matters of religion. Beyond this, we know of no exception, tolerated and approved in the scriptures, either by precept or example. All other grievances should be born, with christian meekness and forbearance, until, by the legitimate use of appropriate means, we can procure an amendment of the constitution.

Questions of equal difficulty may arise, in reference to the time, when Revolution in civil governments may be justifiable. And what may be the duty of christians, in the premises. And how this duty may be ascertained, &c. For on these several points directly, the Word of God is silent. The history of governments, under the conduct of Divine Providence, and the inauguration of governments, under the sanction of Divine authority; together with the manner, in which, they have been recognized and approved, as the ordinances of God, may afford sufficient indications of the Divine Will, to constitute a safe rule of judgment and of duty, in reference to the matter of Revolution.

The earliest forms of government were very simple, and the natural out-growth of the circumstances and necessities of the men and the times. Like the chaos of the earliest material creation, they were essentially without form, and much necessary darkness brooded over them, relative to the distinct shape, which the several departments might ultimately assume. But, as God, whose creature it was, proceeded to develop its essential elements, *Democracy*, appeared, as the fundamental principle of its constitution. The

will of the people was inaugurated, as the ultimate sovereign under God. This was apparent, even in the Patriarchal administration, as was evinced by the pleasure, which the people manifested in its operation, and their cheerful subordination to its authority. The Jewish Theocracy was only God dispensing law, through rulers approved by the people. The Judges of Israel were men, whom Israel chose as their rulers. When God was about to construct a model form of government, both for the Church and the State, as nearly perfect, as the imperfection of men would tolerate, and the circumstances of the times admit; he distinctly recognized the Democratic principle, and gave it a Republican form. Before the institution of the ceremonial economy, while the people of God were yet in Egypt, they had among themselves, an established democracy, administered by representative elders, chosen from among the people.—Ex. 3; 16. Before the publication of the law from Sinai, on motion of Jethro, the Priest of Midian, Moses proceeded to organize a more distinct system of government, civil and ecclesiastical, than had ever existed among them before, choosing out of all the people, *able men*, and placing them in authority “as rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.”—Ex. 18, 21. This was the first example of distinct Republicanism in the history of governments, either in the church or state. Here, Moses appears as the chief magistrate, to hear and judge all great matters, and the *elders*, as subordinate rulers, to adjudicate matters of smaller moment in behalf of the people.—Ex. 18, 25. This simple democracy, in the form of Republicanism, has never been entirely abandoned, in the ecclesiastical department, from that time to the present. From the time of its inauguration, under Moses, it continued without any essential changes, as the only form of administering justice both in the church and state as united in the people of Israel, during a period of four hundred and fifty years.—Acts 13:20. Then, occurred the first revolution, of which we have any detailed account, in the history of Jewish government. The people,

now desire a king. They now ask and demand a king. They must, therefore, have a king. Though not the best thing for them, though, not so good a form of government, as they had before, and not so much according to the mind of God, yet, because the people demand the change, there must be revolution, and a new form of government instituted. God had so signally inaugurated, and so perpetually ratified the principles of democracy, as an essential element, in all departments of human government, he could not now, consistently disregard the expressed will of the people.

The *people*, God had constituted sovereign, in the matter of their own government. And now the sovereign people demand a king. Though it was not desirable in itself, nor in any way pleasing to God; yet he reluctantly granted the request. Thus he, again, ratified the *sovereign will* of the *sovereign people*, as the supreme law of the land.—1 Sam. 10: 19.

Now, then, said Samuel, "If ye will have a king, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and your thousands." And when they had come near, they first voted by tribes, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken, then voting by families, the family of Matri was taken. Thus Saul the son of Kish was duly elected by the people and being anointed by Samuel, the man of the people's choice is the Lord's anointed; the government of the people's choice is God's ordinance, and the executive of the people's choice is God's minister. Thus the truthfulness of the old Latin sentiment is most emphatically demonstrated, "*Vox populi est vox Dei.*" The voice of the people is the voice of God.

This signal acknowledgment of a form of government, which God could give the people *only* in displeasure, as his own ordinance, most clearly indicates to us, that *mere form* is not essential, in his view. That in the church, God will own the Episcopal, the Presbyterian, or the Congregational form, as may be the choice of the people, only let there be subordination to "*the powers that be.*" So in the state, the form may be a monarchy or an aristocracy, or a democracy,

or a mixture of all these, according to the choice of the people. Only let there be government, and "Let every soul be subject unto the higher-powers" for conscience sake.

One form of government may be better than another, and better secure the benevolent ends proposed, and better accord with the mind of God, if the people would choose it. Nevertheless; "*Vox populi est vox Dei.*"

Now then, who is he, that has a right to go with a sword of steel, and revolutionize any government over the heads of a people who are satisfied therewith? The right of revolution is not invested in individuals at all, in their individual capacity; but in the God-appointed sovereignty of the people themselves. When the voice of the people demands revolution, the voice of God demands it. Then the people will sustain the conflict, and receive the new form of government, and be cheerfully subordinate to it.

Had John Brown intended an entire revolution, in the State of Virginia, and taken men and arms enough to have forced a new form of government upon the State, against the will of the people, the result would have been the actual enslavement of the entire population. In direct controvention of the great fundamental law of civil liberty, as ordained of God; the sovereign people would have become, at once, the vassals of tyranny. This principle would fill the world with tyrants, and bind all nations in the chains of a perpetual and hopeless despotism.

Christians, who have the Word of God, need be in no doubt in regard to the time, proper for the revolution of any government, to which, they may owe allegiance; nor in regard to the part which God would have them act in reference to it. We are at no time required to approve things that are wrong in the government; nor to be indifferent to sin, or sinful systems, though, they may be interwoven with the very frame work of society, and surrounded by the mightiest bulwarks of popular sentiment, and made strong also, by the strong munitions of law. We are rather required to put on the whole armour of God, every particular of which,

is described in Eph. 6, 13-18. Being clothed with all this christian panoply, God would have us wage a war of extermination upon every false principle and practice.

Christians belong to a kingdom which is not of this world. They have for their object, indeed, the conquest of this entire world for Christ. But because their weapons are not carnal but spiritual, theirs, will be a subjugation of the *will*, a conquest of the heart. Men are made *willing* in the day of God's power, and cordially renounce their own sins. They become voluntarily, and of choice, the willing and obedient subjects of the Prince of Peace. If we could say as one has recently said in public, "*that we feel and know that the question of slavery is not to be settled by moral suasion; Bible arguments have been tried, but are not destined to finish the work,*" then, of course, we should deem it expedient to sell our Bibles, and purchase broad swords and standard spears and enter upon the work as John Brown did. But we believe the Sharp's rifle economy does not belong to Christ at all. It may compel measures; but will never enlist the affections of men. It may kill their bodies; but will never correct their principles, or improve their character. It may bring down an enemy, in servile subserviency to despotism; but can never exalt him to liberty, and love, as a freeman of the Lord. It is adapted only to degrade, whatsoever it does not destroy.

Christ then, would have his disciples thoroughly schooled in the principles of peace and good will to men, and clothed with the armour of peace, go forth, "Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners;" to wage a spiritual warfare with the "rulers of the darkness of this world, and against all spiritual wickedness in high places." It is the proper work of a Christian Reformer to address the intellect, to educate the mind, to reform the character and improve the morals of mankind; and thus exalt, dignify, and beautify society, with all the proper adornments of real virtue, and true religion. Then whenever any people become exalted in refinement, intelligence and virtue, sufficiently to

demand the revolution of whatever government may be over them, it will be according to the good pleasure of God that they should have it. And He will surely give it to them. Then, christians, in their capacity as citizens, may be bound, by the will of God, to share, with their fellow citizens, all the perils, and hardships of a revolutionary struggle. And for so doing, will have sufficient warrant both from the Word of God, and from the example of the good.

From this subject, as now presented, we may see :

1. What are the proper qualities of a genuine Christian Reformer.

It will not be enough for a man to come to us with the assurance that he is ever faithful to his abiding convictions of truth and duty. This, indeed, may be adjudged as one of the essentials of a proper manhood. This manhood itself, and all the world beside, would reproach a man who should contravene, directly, his own abiding convictions of truth and duty. For these are his only fixed principles. Yet this would not indicate to us whether he was a good man, or a bad man. To form a correct judgment of his character, we must first know *what his principles are*. For no man is, ever, any better than his principles ; seldom, indeed, as good. If his principles, or his abiding convictions of truth and duty, are right and good, and then we have the assurance that he is faithful and true to them ; we may know assuredly, that he is a good man. But if his principles are bad, then, the man will be a bad man, *because* he abides by bad principles. And the more closely he adheres to his bad principles, the worse he will be, and the more dangerous. It will not help the matter, to say that he is *honest*, in holding his views, and really believes them to be true and right. For, thinking, or believing a thing to be true, cannot, make it true. No degree of honesty in holding error can possibly change its nature so as to make it true and safe. "There is a way," saith God, "which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is death." The sincerity of men, in holding

error, should be deemed rather, a matter of mourning, than of rejoicing. For it renders their condition more hopeless, their influence more dangerous, and all their purposes of evil more desperate and deadly. Such a consideration, surely, ought not to be urged, as an excuse of exculpation for the holding of error.

The genuine Christian reformer will not adopt any mere "*myth*" of his own imagination, under, the disguising title of a higher-law, as his rule of duty. A besotted Hottentot might do as much as this. Conscience, like the needle of the compass, needs thorough *charging*, as an essential condition of its working. If it be well charged with the light of God's Word, and the grace of His Spirit, it will surely quiver and settle toward the true Pole. But, like the compass-needle, it must have constant supervision, frequent corrections, and repeated chargings, because surrounded by false attractions which hold it athwart the truth. Then it will drive us to wreck upon the fatal reefs of misfortune. The true Christian Reformer will not consent, for a single moment, to be ruled by his impulses at all. He is rather a man who will rule his impulses. In all doubtful extremities, he will suspend judgment, and defer action, until he can correct his compass, rectify his principles, and make his convictions just what he knows they ought to be. Holding the reins of rule, even over his own conscience, he will modify, mould, shape, fashion and direct, all his convictions, altogether by the higher-law of God. He will sift, prove, educate, refine, chasten, and rectify, all his inward impulses by the Word of God and prayer, until he is thoroughly purified from an "*evil conscience*." Then, so long as he can keep it in coincidence with the unerring standard of truth, he will keep it inviolate. And so, out of a "*good conscience*," both toward God, and toward men, he will be prepared to put on the whole armour of light, and go forth to the conflict. He has first reformed himself, and, therefore, knows what needs to be done for others, and on what principles to proceed. His feet being now shod with the preparation of the gospel

of peace, he can take an intelligible position upon the unalterable law of God. Confident that his foundation standeth sure, he can, with true Christian fortitude, unsheath the sword of God's eternal Spirit, and revealing both its edges and its point, he can make full proof of Christ's appointed method for the invasion of satan's kingdom. Thus he will wage an uncompromising war upon the rulers of the darkness of this world. Fearless, though surrounded with lines of fire, or confronted by legions of devils, he will strive, in the strength of God, to guard the entrance of every false and dangerous way. And with the sword, which is sharper than any sword of steel, he will endeavor to cut up by the roots every delusive principle,—assail every unholy practice and maxim,—breast every tide of corrupt moral sentiment, however popular or prevalent; and thus labor to rear the mighty ramparts of truth against every invasion of error, and every system of wrong.

2. We may learn, also, from this subject, what are the true principles, on which every successful attempt at moral reformation must proceed.

Moral reformation can be attained, only upon the voluntary principle—the principle of true democracy. The idea of forcing moral reforms upon the people is utterly preposterous and absurd. To oblige a *slave*, against his will, to leave Virginia and go to Canada, would be to add violence to his oppression. To force a slave-holder, at the point of the bayonet, to relinquish his slaves, could have no better effect upon his heart or character, than a high-way robbery. To compel a covetous man to sell all that he hath, and give to the poor, would have no tendency to make him benevolent. We can rationally hope for no good results from measures of this kind. The church need never attempt to drive the world to heaven with a rod of iron. All efforts put forth on this principle must prove abortive. The absurdity of the principle must insure its failure. The calamitous issue at Harper's Ferry was just what might have been expected, at the beginning. The whole result is fraught with evil, and

only evil. Simply because the Lord reigns, who always overrules evil for good, some good may come out of it. It may awaken more thought, call forth more prayer, and more judicious effort in behalf of emancipation. It may lead to more thorough investigation of those higher-law principles which were so extensively involved in those scenes of blood, and thus undeceive many infatuated persons, who are in danger of being driven to a similar ruin. It may also help to correct a growing sentiment of error in regard to the validity of "*the powers that be,*" and thus check the progress of an evil, which might prove more disastrous than slavery itself. And besides all this, it must shew to those who study the subject a most emphatic practical demonstration of the absurdity of the false principles that were involved.

It is, moreover, preposterous to attempt the reformation of *governments*, as a means of reaching and reforming the *people*. God who ordained human government, had previously given to men, and things, such a nature and constitution, as it pleased himself. Hence, He Himself must needs observe the law of adaptation, in framing governments. In so doing he has made known to us the true and the only principle on which a government can be adapted to a people. And all governments that do not recognize the voluntary principle, must prove a failure. God has in his providence inaugurated, and ratified the sovereign will of majorities, as the binding law of nations, and the fundamental principle both of the organization and administration of all human governments. Why, then, should we not fall in with God's method? Can we, in the natural world, plow and sow, and gather harvests, in the season of Winter? No more can we reach and reform the people through the government. This would be absurdly attempting to reverse the order of Nature, and to contravene all its laws.

Though ordained of God, the government is the creature of the people. It must, therefore, be as they make it. And they will make it, as they wish it. And they will wish and make it good, or bad, according as they are themselves intel-

ligent and virtuous, or degraded and vicious. And only as they themselves wish and make it, will they use, or even endure it. Hence, then, the seat of disease, in every diseased body politic, will be found, ultimately, to reside in the masses. And for this reason, all judicious, and hopeful remedial appliances must be addressed, directly, to the people, for their moral, civil, social and religious elevation.

3. The subject teaches us also, that as Christian citizens of a Christian commonwealth we should not only refrain from resisting "the *powers that be*," but with joy and gratitude, praise God that he was ever pleased to ordain civil government over men at all, and that he has thrown around it the sanction of his own authority for its protection and sure defence. But for this, we might disband society at once. Yea, surrender all that is sacred in civil liberty and religious freedom, and all that is desirable in moral elevation and social refinement, and at once, bow in homage at the shrine of passion, and yield to the relentless reign of despotism, or the deadly sway of a hopeless anarchy.

But more especially should we praise God for such a government as claims our allegiance. With all its imperfections, yea, with all its acknowledged corruptions, it is the best in the world. It is the best in form, and the best in fact, that has ever existed in the world. It is in principle, more liberal, in administration, more equal, and, in its results, more benevolent than any other without exception. In Pagan lands the civil department claims, and exercises exclusive prerogatives over the sacred. Men, there, may worship only when, and only where, and only as, the magistrate prescribes. Because christianity, in its essential nature, is opposed to such intolerance, the christian church, from the beginning has been hunted, imprisoned and burned by these persecuting powers, until finally she fled for retreat to the wilderness. Here she has planted the seed, and nourished the plant of religious toleration, and has bequeathed the fruit, as a rich inheritance, to us, and to our children forever. Here, instead of persecution by the state, we have

an open Bible and the protection of the "*powers that be*" in the use of it. Here, we have the Christian Sabbath, and the promise and form of legal protection in its improvement. Here, we may rear our temples, build our altars, observe our ordinances, and sit together in heavenly places, having none to molest. We may preach, and pray, and sing, and worship, when, and where we please, and all the government has to do in the matter, is to protect and encourage us in so doing. And this it is bound to do, by all the fundamental principles of its organization and constitution. Here, every citizen is protected by the strong arm of civil power in the legitimate use of all the means that God may place at his disposal, for the moral, intellectual, social and religious elevation of himself and others. It, not only, tolerates sentiment, but facilitates its free expression, except only when intended for the detriment of others. Free speech, a free pulpit, and a free press, are the sure guaranty of all christian citizens. It would be better, indeed, if we could say so of all *persons*. But slavery is a dark blot upon our national escutcheon, by which great multitudes are excluded from the privilege of citizenship at all. Were these installed as citizens, the same protection and benefits would extend to them which now we enjoy as a goodly heritage. But to erase this blot, and retrieve our nation's honor, we have, as christians, the God-appointed means, and the protection of a christian commonwealth in their legitimate use. Why should christians, then, above all other persons, resist such a government?

If the state is contented, with its secular department, and desists from persecuting the church in her mission of grace in the *spiritual*; surely, it is meet that the church should be content with the spiritual department; and desist from all interference with the state in the *secular*. If the state is willing to extend the hand of aid and protection, to the church, in her proper work, in the sacred department; surely it is meet, that the church should aid, and cheerfully encourage the state in the *secular*. If, instead of resisting the

government, we, as christians, do thankfully use the benefits secured by it, and rightly improve the help, and protection afforded by it; and go forward, in the proper use of appointed means, pressing the conquests of Christ's kingdom, strongly into the camp of the enemy; we may be confident of ultimate triumph. By the blessing and grace of God, slavery will, ere long be done away. Wars and blood-shed will cease forever. The lion and the lamb will lie down together. "They shall not hurt, nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." And all that exalts itself against God, shall be brought down.

Then the same old Protestant banner of liberty, that first waved over these then, unbroken forests, will be again unfurled,—torn, though it may be in battle,—or stained with blood, or scathed with fire; yet bearing visible, the old motto "*E Pluribus Unum*;" and just over it, its scriptural interpretation: "The kingdoms of this world have all become the kingdoms of our Lord." And just beneath it; down among the stars and the stripes, will be written in characters of light and glory: "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven have been given to the people of the saints of the Most High." Then, in testimony of their cordial acceptance of it, and their willing obedience to it, all the people will say "Amen: Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."